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SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS LEADING TOGETHER

STATEMENT BY CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS ON MISTREATMENT OF SOUTHWEST AIRLINES PASSENGER, ANILA DAULATZAI

Our organizations are appalled at the mistreatment of Anila Daulatzai by Southwest Airlines and the Maryland Transportation Authority Police (MDTA). We support Ms. Daulatzai's demands and call for changes in policy and practice on the part of Southwest Airlines and the MDTA.

Communities of color unfortunately endure profiling at airports and on airlines on a regular basis. In fact, Muslim, Arab, South Asian and Sikh passengers have experienced a disproportionately high level of discrimination in the 16 years since September 11, 2001. "Flying while brown" means that passengers are often subjected to secondary screenings, interrogations, bodily searches, and removal from airplanes for no legitimate reason at all.

Anila Daulatzai, a pregnant woman who is a Pakistani American and a Muslim, is the latest person to face this type of airline discrimination. In her case, Southwest Airlines staff insisted that Daulatzai deplane her flight because of a dog allergy even though she had made it clear that her allergies were not life-threatening. Instead of believing Daulatzai's own statements about her physical conditions, Southwest Airlines personnel chose to escalate the situation by alerting the Maryland Transportation Authority Police (MDTA). According to Daulatzai, MDTA law enforcement agents pulled her from her seat via her belt loop, tore her pants, and dragged her through the aisle. They then allegedly made racist remarks about immigrants and charged her with disorderly conduct and other criminal charges.

Ms. Daulatzai's mistreatment by Southwest Airlines is part of a pattern and practice of profiling. Between 2015 and 2016, over a period of just six months, several Muslim, Arab, and South Asian passengers reported incidents of being rebooked for their appearance, removed from a flight for speaking in Arabic in a private phone conversation or simply for asking to switch seats. In a particularly egregious incident, a white passenger who forcibly removed a Muslim passenger's hijab was not even apprehended by airline personnel, and it was only through repeated insistence by the Muslim passenger that law enforcement was notified after the plane landed. In response to these and other incidents, many of our organizations have frequently raised concerns about Southwest Airlines' policies and practices. However, Southwest Airlines' senior corporate leadership has not been forthcoming about the company's protocols and practices related to employee trainings, airline personnel responses to passengers aboard flights, and civil rights infractions.

In the case of Ms. Daulatzai, Southwest Airlines was not the only entity involved. The airline escalated the situation by calling in law enforcement personnel from the MDTA. Indeed, the involvement of law enforcement personnel in Ms. Daulatzai's case is reminiscent of the mistreatment and use of force against another passenger of color, David Dao, on a United Airlines flight earlier this year. This sort of treatment of passengers of color cannot be tolerated.

We call upon the MDTA to drop the criminal charges against Ms. Daulatzai. We also call upon both the MDTA and Southwest Airlines to provide adequate and appropriate restitution to Ms. Daulatzai. In addition, we demand that both the MDTA and Southwest Airlines make systemic changes to their policies and protocols. We call upon both entities to disclose their protocols for responding to passenger-related situations aboard flights, including their trainings and practices around de-escalation and mediation tactics. We continue to demand that Southwest Airlines training policies be disclosed publically, and that personnel at all levels be provided with mandatory and regular trainings on conflict resolution, de-escalation tactics, anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, and anti-racism. We call upon the MDTA to engage in regular trainings on Islamophobia, systemic racism, xenophobia, anti-Blackness, and implicit bias.

Signatories:

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